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ABSTRACT

A resident outdoor education experience for public schools enhances all areas of the curriculum and breaks down barriers between the various disciplines. Learning is more rapid and retention is greater because outdoor learning experiences involve all of the child's senses. Resident outdoor programs improve communications between teacher and student and promote group interaction in all phases of daily life. Objectives of such a program are to sensitize the child to a natural environment, to increase his capacity for observation and learning, to develop a sense of responsibility toward natural resources, and to provide outdoor recreational experiences. (JH)

NEW JERSEY STATE SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION
Branchville, New Jersey

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A RESIDENT OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To sensitize the child to a natural environment through first-hand environmental exposure by which an awareness and an understanding of our natural resources as they relate to society and to the environment are created.

2. To develop an appreciation for a clean, aesthetic environment through direct exposure to such an environment.

3. To increase the child's capacity for observation and learning as he becomes more sensitive to his environment.

4. To develop an ecological awareness through the study of the interrelationships of all living organisms to their environment on which political, social and economic concepts can be built.

5. To develop desirable attitudes which serve to guide behavior toward resources through direct purposeful activities in the out-of-doors.

6. To develop a sense of responsibility towards natural resources and future generations by recognizing the need for preserving open space and natural areas for future use.

7. To provide outdoor recreational experiences by which a child may develop skills for use in leisure time.

8. To provide an opportunity in social living and group interaction which extends far beyond what is experienced in the classroom.

9. To increase the range of communication between teachers and students.

10. To help a child become a better, more useful citizen, active in community affairs and well-informed on various issues.

A resident outdoor education experience for public schools can, and does, serve to enrich and supplement the school curriculum. Although it is difficult to evaluate just how much an outdoor education experience does for a child, it is generally accepted that a good outdoor education experience is a desirable part of a school's program. We do know that certain things do take place in an outdoor setting that cannot be duplicated in the classroom.

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Learning in the out-of-doors has been shown by research to enable a child to learn more rapidly and to retain more material for a longer period of time. This is true for a number of reasons, the main one being that it is not really work to learn in the out-of-doors. In such an informal, relaxed atmosphere learning becomes enjoyable and even exciting when discovering something for the first time. Through such direct experiences, a child may use all of his senses rather then just sight and sound. He can touch, smell, and often taste things in the out-of-doors as well as see them and hear them. Thus his powers of observation are increased and learning takes place more readily.

As our country becomes more and more urbanized, fewer and fewer children have the opportunity to become exposed to the natural environment - to observe wildlife in their natural habitats, to swim, canoe, and fish in lakes, rivers and streams that are free from pollution, and to observe the true natural beauty of forests and woodlands. In many cases a school's outdoor education program provides the only link a child has with the natural setting. A child can never become sensitized to a clean, aesthetic environment- can never develop an appreciation for open space and areas of natural beauty - if all he is ever exposed to is ugliness - pollution, ever populated towns and cities, and the asphalt plots that are called playgrounds. A child cannot be expected to identify resource problems in his own community if he has not had the opportunity to live in a natural setting and have some knowledge of such a setting to use as a comparison.

A child that has an opportunity to live and work and play in an outdoor education program in a natural setting will develop the necessary attitudes and the sense of responsibility necessary for maintaining open space lands for future generations for recreation and learning. He will also exhibit proper respect and behavior for land that he uses for recreation and other activities.

These values gained through the outdoor education experience are gained not only through the areas of natural science, but also through the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. The beauty of an outdoor education program is that it enhances all areas of the curriculum - all subjects can and should be integrated into the experience. No area of the curriculum need be neglected during the experience. The science, math, english, social studies, physical education, and art teachers can all work side by side to help their students develop proper attitudes and an awareness and appreciation for their environment. Outdoor education, therefore, helps to break down the barriers between the various disciplines.

Much can also be said for the social aspects of the outdoor education experience. The barriers to communication between teacher and students are broken down in the outdoor setting and the teacher can observe the students in group interaction in all phases of daily life. This cannot be done as easily on to this extent in the classroom. Teachers and students get to know each other better and to respect each other more for their opinions and ideas and basic differences. The opportunity afforded children in a resident outdoor education program for a democratic living experience cannot be duplicated in the classroom, and children often develop more maturity and self-reliance in one week then in an entire school year.

Careful preparation before the outdoor education experience and extensive follow-up activities afterward will help make the outdoor educaton program much more meaningful and valuable to both students and teacher. The week's experience must not be a separate entity apart from the rest of the curriculum. This would cause the program to lose much of its meaning and value. It must be an integral part of the school curriculum meeting the goals and objectives of that curriculum. Then, and only then, can the fullworth of an outdoor education program be realized.

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